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Determinants of Sustained Volunteerism in Sport Organizations in Hong Kong

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Introduction

The crucial role played by volunteers in sport service delivery is well recognised and documented. However, while there has been considerable research on sport volunteers, most studies have been based typically on theories and samples derived from a western context. This study examined determinants of sustained volunteerism in sport organisations in Hong Kong adapting a theoretical model developed by Penner (2002).

Literature Review

Penner's model (2002) begins with the decision to volunteer, the point at which the person makes a commitment to become a volunteer. The decision is influenced by demographic variables (e.g. age, income, and education), three dispositional variables (e.g. personal beliefs and values, prosocial personality and volunteer-related motives) and organizational variables (e.g. organizational commitment and organizational justice). Situational factors can have impacts but are not influential on the individual's decision to volunteer. Before people decide to volunteer they are exposed to both explicit and implicit kinds of social pressures such as how their significant others feel about them becoming a volunteer and their motivation to comply with these feelings (Grube & Piliavin, 2000; Penner, 2002).

Once the decision to volunteer has been made, the next stage is initial volunteerism, which is the amount of time and effort a person expends during the early stage of his/her tenure as a volunteer. The next path in the model is volunteer role identity; the stage in which a person identifies with and internalizes the role of becoming a volunteer (Grube and Piliavin, 2000). Penner (2002) posits that a person's experiences during the initial volunteerism phase will shape his/her volunteer role identity; the direct cause of sustained volunteerism. Grube and Piliavin (2000) concurred with Penner that role identity is an important element of understanding volunteers' participation and long term retention in organizational settings. Davila and Chacon (2007) later argued that role identity was the key determinant of sustained volunteerism but it was found to be weakly related to the remaining variables that explained the decision to volunteer and initial volunteerism.

Method

The scales and items utilised in the study have been widely used in western settings to identify motivation and prosocial personality characteristics conducive to volunteering. Organizational factors such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment and organizational justice were also used to determine the interaction between volunteers and the organizations with which they were engaged (Clary et al, 1998; Penner, Finkelstein and Brannick, 2005; Cuskelly and Boag, 2001; Hancer and George, 2003; Wright, 2008). Two dimensions of sustained volunteerism were examined: general and organization-specific. General sustained volunteerism (GSV) was measured by two questions "For how long in total have you been volunteering for any organization?" and "How likely is it that you will discontinue to volunteer in the future?" Organization-specific sustained volunteerism (OSV) was measured by "How long have you been volunteering for the current voluntary organization for which you work?" and "How often do you give serious consideration to stop volunteering for the current voluntary organization for which you work?"

Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire distributed to volunteers in five Hong Kong peak sport organizations (n=401; response rate=59%) and analysed using STATA utilising generalized linear models with appropriate variance and link functions and standard errors robust to clustering effects. A generalized linear model (GLM) is an extension of the traditional linear model and allows models to fit data that follow probability distribution other than the normal distribution. The GLM with robust standard errors was used in the study to account for clustering effects, as volunteers were serving in similar types of organizations. Because of limited

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variability, the relatively high inter-correlation between variables, and the exploratory nature of this project, all GLM models were estimated using STATA with a slightly higher significance level of 0.10.

Results, Discussion & Conclusion

General sustained volunteerism (GSV)

A positive association was found between role identity and total time spent volunteering. Female sport volunteers contributed more years volunteering than their male counterparts. Those volunteers who were divorced/separated had spent fewer years volunteering than their single counterparts. Organizational commitment was positively associated with GSV in sport volunteers. Similar predictive results were also found for some of the organizational variables such as, intrinsic job satisfaction (positive association), general job satisfaction (positive association) and informational justice (negative association). Volunteers with lower levels of reported social pressure indicated a greater chance of discontinuing volunteering in the future.

Positive associations were found between likelihood of discontinuing to volunteer and social and career motives. On the other hand, negative associations were found between the likelihood of discontinuing to volunteer and ego enhancement and understanding motives. Organizational variables, such as systemic justice and informational justice were significantly related to the likelihood of discontinuing volunteering. Negative associations were found for organizational commitment and informational justice. General job satisfaction was negatively related to the likelihood of quitting volunteering.

Organization-specific sustained volunteerism (OSV)

Older and single volunteers reported more time spent volunteering for their current sport organization. Furthermore, those who spent more time volunteering in their current organization were likely to be who scored: 1) higher on self-reported altruism, organizational commitment, intrinsic job satisfaction, systemic justice, and role identity; and, 2) lower on general job satisfaction and informational justice.

Those volunteers who were married as well as those who were divorced (as compared to single), tended to more frequently consider withdrawing from their current organization. In addition, those with higher scores on social pressure, moral reasoning, self-reported altruism, and extrinsic job satisfaction tended to more frequently consider quitting. On the other hand, those with lower role identity, empathic concern, organizational commitment, general job satisfaction and informational justice were found to more frequently consider stopping volunteering.

By utilising a western model of sustained volunteerism in an Asian context, this study provides crucial information for the development of volunteer recruitment and retention strategies in a wide range of sport service delivery settings. The results suggest that sport organizations may need to adopt different approaches to the effective recruitment and management of volunteers based on the dispositional attributes of their volunteers in addition to context specific organizational parameters. Consequently this may lead to improved volunteer retention rates as sport organizations utilize more focused, customized and context relevant volunteer management strategies.